

/Sarah- Kate Venison, TESTIMONY on HB 7027, February 23, 2017

Senator Formica, Senator Osten, Representative Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Sarah-Kate Venison and I am a registered voter in Fairfield. I am testifying regarding HB 7027, An Act Concerning the State Budget. **I am particularly concerned about the proposed "consolidation" cut to the Regional Mental Health Boards, which would in fact eliminate those entities.**

I am not only a registered voter, but a licensed mental health professional with significant experience in both the private and public sectors of mental health care delivery in Connecticut. Further, I am currently the Chairperson of one of the Southwest Regional Mental Health boards Consumer Area Councils (CAC).

In my role overseeing clinical services in a community agency, we provide services across the spectrum from prevention to intervention. These services are vital to consumers to be able to understand and access services for themselves and their family members. The Regional Mental Health Boards are critical in providing information to the public and providers, and offer a crucial opportunity for collaboration amongst agencies, municipalities, providers and consumers.

Independent review of services and programs available are a core function of the Boards. This function protects and informs the people of the State of Connecticut by providing valuable feedback regarding access, quality and efficacy of the programs available to consumers, Independent review, with a consumer voice ,is key to identifying need and spending our money wisely, while maintaining critical services to our many residents in need of mental health and addiction services.

It is imperative that the committee understands that without the Boards, these feedback and collaboration opportunities will simply be gone. This will mark a huge setback in the already difficult task of educating the public, reducing stigma and meeting the needs of thousands of residents of the State of Connecticut.

**Respectfully,
Sarah-Kate Venison, LMFT**

